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AUTHOR Thomas, Carol F.
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ABSTRACT

In order to meet its goals of developing and improving the capacity of state and local education agencies and institutions of higher education to prevent and eliminate alcohol and other drug abuse in the schools, the Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities undertook collaboration with other groups to fight drug abuse. The staff of the Center were involved in network, cooperative, and collaborative working relationships to enable the Center to better identify the training and technical assistance needs of various groups, assure efficient use of limited funds, avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, and bring the best possible resources to bear on the alcohol and drug problem in schools and communities. The Center found that collaboration promoted wider involvement and sharper focus on the drug problem and allowed each community to tailor solutions to its own needs and populations. It was also found that the concept of collaboration is derived from political and philosophical assumptions relative to parity and involvement of clients in the decision-making process. Collaboration was found to imply a new institution or structure. Successful collaboration required awareness of organizational barriers and strategies to counterbalance them. Finally, collaboration required a common issue, activities, institutional support, skillful people, organizational structure, time and leadership. (ABL)

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FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS: COLLABORATION IN THE WESTERN CENTER FOR DRUG-FREE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES PROJECT

by

Carol F. Thomas, Ph.D.
Southwest Regional Educational Laboratory
4665 Lampson Ave.
Los Alamitos, CA 90720
(213) 598-7661

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Forging New Partnerships:
Collaboration in the
Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities Project

Introduction

Problems resulting from the use of alcohol and other drugs are among the most pressing facing the citizens of this country. Attempts to address the problem are being made on several fronts: prevention, law enforcement, and treatment. Resources to implement these strategies are provided by federal initiatives, like the Western Center, state level agencies, county-level programs, universities, private service providers, school districts, and parent and community groups.

As a result of recent federal legislation and funding, as well as state and local efforts, the number of organizations and agencies involved in alcohol and other drug use prevention has proliferated. Many of the persons involved in these efforts have come together as formal and informal task forces, advisory groups and networks in order to coordinate and collaborate with each other. At the same time, local communities and school districts have been moving forward to identify and train prevention coordinators, develop long-term prevention programs and education plans and begin to implement these plans. Planning for substance abuse programs, whether in the schools or in the community, requires collaboration between a variety of people and agencies in order to maximize the probability of success.

The purpose of my presentation is to describe the efforts of the Western Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities in working with the myriad of agencies and professionals involved in the concerted effort to eliminate drug and alcohol abuse in our schools. Throughout, I would also like to share some observations and learnings about the process of collaboration gleaned during our work.

Western Center

First, a little background about the Western Center. The purpose of the Western Center is to develop and improve the capacity of state education agencies, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education to prevent and eliminate alcohol and other drug abuse in the schools. The Center is one of five regional centers across the nation, all funded by the

federal government through the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1986. The Western Center has four primary areas of responsibility: 1) to provide training and technical assistance for school district teams to plan and implement long-term, effective alcohol and other drug abuse prevention programs; 2) to assist state education agencies in their prevention efforts; 3) to work with institutions of higher education in training; and 4) to provide assistance in evaluating alcohol and other drug abuse prevention programs.

What is Collaboration and Why do it?

Although targeted federal legislation and financial allocations of the current magnitude are new, the problem of drug abuse and the dedicated professionals who fight it are not. In order to achieve our goals, the Western Center, being a relatively new player, had to become an integral part of the on going efforts in each state. This has involved a great deal of collaboration and coordination. Before I go further, I would like to define some terms. There are three types of working relationships that can be considered on a continuum from less to more complex relationships: networks, cooperation relationships, and collaborative relationships. Each type requires different expectations, different levels of interaction and communications, and different levels of commitment from the partnerships.

A network is the least complex relationship. It is a relationship defined by interrelated groups who have the capacity to communicate. Networks share information and make referrals to each other. Networks just need to cross paths occasionally to stay in place. Networks might exchange or write articles for each other's newsletters, for example.

Cooperative relationships are characterized by mutual agreements and understandings to work together, or at the very least, not to interfere with each other. In cooperative relationships, the partners can share resources and information, but the independence of each party is clearly maintained. Agencies engaging in cooperative relationships might co-sponsor events.

Collaborative relationships are characterized by a large amount of mutual trust and the sharing of decision-making and authority. The partnership itself becomes an entity that represents the needs of all the partners involved. Shared authority is reflected in joint planning, implementation, and evaluation. A collaborative relationship might be established to conduct a county-wide needs assessment of the drug problem, for example.

Western Center Collaboration

The Western Center staff are involved in all three types of working relationships. These relationships enable the Center to better identify the training and technical assistance needs of various groups, assure us of efficient use of limited funds, avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, and most important, bring the best possible resources to bear on the alcohol and other drug problem in schools and communities.

The Western Center's general communication strategies involve both network and coordination relationships. The Center meets regularly with two important groups that provide us with valuable insights regarding needs. The first, the Western Center Advisory group, represents state, local and higher education agencies; judicial and law enforcement agencies; health and human service agencies; and community, civic, and cultural organizations. The second group, the Partners in Prevention, provides a mechanism for coordination with state agencies involved in alcohol and drug abuse prevention.

To provide information to the field about Western Center activities, recent research on prevention, and noteworthy programs, the Center produces a quarterly newsletter that is sent to over 5000 persons in the region. In addition, staff make presentations at conferences such as Californians for a Drug-Free Youth, California Conference on Alcohol Problems, and so forth.

In addition to these general communication strategies, the Center staff have established both coordination and collaboration relationships with a variety of organizations. Using California as an example, I will try to summarize who we coordinate and collaborate with, and mention some of the specific strategies we have used.

At the local level, school districts have identified persons responsible for program coordination. The Western Center communicates with these district coordinators to offer and provide training and technical assistance services. Participants in Western Center training workshops include school district teams. The drug problem is multi-dimensional, so different groups must be part of the solution. Collaboration is an effective policy tool to manage change better--it doesn't place the burden of problem-solving solely on the schools. We encourage school districts to include community members such as the clergy, parents and law enforcement representatives on their school teams. Team participants, therefore, may include district coordinators, a teacher, an administrator, a parent-community representative,

a student, law enforcement personnel, community service agency staff, and school support staff. These teams identify different problems to address and have different expertise represented. The Western Center's technical assistance is tailored to meet the needs of these diverse groups.

At the county level, the Western Center works with county offices of education and county alcohol and drug program offices to coordinate and co-sponsor training events. This enables school districts to hear about the services available to them from county agencies in their area. The Center also coordinates with existing networking groups at the county and regional level, such as Orange County's Prevention Network.

At the state level, key agencies involved in prevention are part of a complex organizational structure. The structure involves three elected officials' office: The Governor's Office, the Attorney General's Office and the State Superintendent of Instruction. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs and the Office of Criminal Justice Planning are under the Governor's administration; the Crime Prevention Center is under the Attorney General's administration; the State Department of Education and its resource centers and systems are under the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Western Center, on the other hand, is administered by the U. S. Department of Education.

Each of these offices are mandated in some way to develop and implement programs that protect and help the citizens of California to lead healthy, drug-free lives. Each of these agencies has programs that provide various prevention services. The State Department of Education administers a variety of alcohol and other drug prevention education programs in California schools. The Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs is the state agency responsible for providing leadership and coordination to the statewide alcohol and drug abuse services delivery system. The Attorney General's Crime Prevention Center is committed to the prevention and reduction of drug and alcohol use and abuse as a corollary of its crime prevention activities. And the Office of Criminal Justice Planning operates several programs focused on the suppression of alcohol and drug use in the schools.

Each of these agencies has different missions, different constituencies, different staff expertise, and different ways of structuring their work. All these agencies, however, have a commitment to work together to solve alcohol and other drug problems in California. The Western Center, along with these other agencies participates in interagency prevention

efforts, such as the State Department of Education's Alcohol/Drug Advisory Council and co-sponsors conferences such as the Attorney General's Challenge Seminars/

Given the number of agencies involved in prevention efforts and their different missions and clients, it is not surprising that those in the field find it confusing to sort out which agency can best provide them with the services and assistance they need. Here I will mention one specific example of a successful state-level collaboration that the Western Center staff participated in here in California. Staff from the California Department of Education, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of Criminal Justice Planning, the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs, and the Western Center staffs recognized the need for a document that responded to the need for up-to-date accurate information about California's provision of prevention services. We formed a coalition, as a single purpose group, to develop a document that would be helpful to those in the field in understanding California's ongoing prevention efforts.

The document, called Sorting Out Services: A Resource Guide to State Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention Services in California, is truly a collaborative effort--from initial idea to final product. Each agency participated in coalition meetings to develop the concept, submit information about their various programs, and review drafts of the document. Staff from PrevNet, a program of the State Department of Education, contributed the clever title, and staff from the Attorney General's office contributed the camera-ready cover design. The State Department of Education provided resources for printing the document and the Western Center staff facilitated the coalition meetings and compiled and edited the document. In addition, each agency is disseminating the guide to their own constituents throughout the state.

Observations on the Collaborative Process

In summary, several observations about collaboration are worth noting. First, collaboration reflects and is embedded in an American tradition that assumes that groups of institutions, agencies, and community representatives are more effective in solving complex problems than if independent and unilateral actions are taken. In our experience, collaboration promotes wider involvement and sharper focus on the drug problem and allows each community to tailor solutions to its own needs and populations.

Second, the concept of collaboration is derived from political and philosophical assumptions relative to parity and involvement of clients in the decision making process. Individuals engaged in collaborative efforts do so with an institution or agency with which they are not connected. In collaboration, individuals represent institutions. Therefore, they draw on the resources of those institutions and are constrained by the structure, goals, and processes of their own organizations. Successful collaboration extends the resources brought to bear on a problem and results in a much broader exchange of ideas.

Third, collaboration implies a new institution or structure whether formally or informally organized. Each of the primary collaborating institutions has its own organization, governance, and management structure; its own communication channels; its own power figures; its own decision-making process. Where it joins with others in a collaborative effort, new structures and processes are required. The interaction of relatively independent institutions can lead to communication problems. Lines of communication are known within institutions but no clear channels exist in collaborative efforts. Development of a shared language can help break down traditional institutional barriers. For example, school systems generally use the term student assistance programs while county drug and alcohol program offices tend to use the term intervention programs. Sometimes, persons will use the terms student assistance programs synonymously with peer counseling, when in fact, they are very different. Until terms are commonly defined, it is difficult for groups to work together.

Fourth, there are some common barriers to successful collaboration that should be avoided. Institutional posturing and turf disputes impede collaboration, for example, separate alcohol and drug programs at national, state, and county levels. Some institutions may have limited resources for participation in collaborative activities so agency representation fluctuates. Sometimes the collaboration experiences a slow start or requires extra time because the program staff participating can't make the final decisions to move an activity forward. Collaboration concerns relationships among people--how organizations as well as individuals relate to one another. Just as individuals bring their own perspectives to any relationship, agencies and organizations have their own hang-ups, mindsets, behavior patterns and bad habits. Each institution harbors its own innate pressures, such as restrictive budgets and policies, that fly in the face of collaborative efforts. Successful collaboration requires awareness of these barriers and strategies to counterbalance them.

Finally, there are several organizational preconditions can be identified that increase the probability that collaborative endeavors will be initiated and sustained. Collaboration starts

with a common issue--a reason to pull people together to share ideas. However, initially, activities propel the collaboration, not goals. Top level, institutional support is essential. They remove bureaucratic impediments, share resources, and provide incentives to their staffs for participating. Successful collaboration requires skillful people, some type of organizational structure, time and leadership.

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